DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 382 RE 001 865

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Pitfalls and their Avoidance in Teaching Phonics.

Pub Date Mar 69

Note-19p.; Paper presented at the College Reading Association conference, Boston, Mass., Mar. 13-15, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.05

Descriptors-Beginning Reading, Individualized Instruction, *Phonics, *Reading Instruction, *Teaching Methods, Teaching Procedures, Teaching Techniques

A discussion of several shortcomings of phonics instruction is aimed at aiding teachers in avoiding such pitfalls as (1) following just one method of phonics instruction whether or not it is helpful to children, (2) treating all children alike and teaching them all the same phonetic elements at the same time, (3) continuing an approach regardless of its effectiveness with some or all children in a class, (4) treating phonics and phonetics as if they were the same, and (5) adhering to pronouncements by experts without scrutiny of their value in immediate circumstances. Examples of these pitfalls are given, along with suggestions for avoiding them. The conclusion is reached that an eclectic approach to phonics should be taken by teachers in order to provide individual children with the particular help they need in whatever way they can best learn. (MD)

ED031382

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PITFALLS AND THEIR AVOIDANCE IN TEACHING PHONICS

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RE 001 865

Usually before giving a phonics lecture to a group of teachers, I place on the blackboard "bemptage" and "musician." "Let's role play," I say. "I'll be the kid you're trying to help to pronounce these words. I'm going to give you a tough time but I do promise that if you are flexible and really know your stuff, I will become an apt student. Who would like to be the teacher?" At this point I observe a number of lowered heads and tensely drawn faces. Finally one brave soul (frequently an experienced teacher with a let's see, I-wouldn't-be-here-if-I-knew-all-the-answers-attitude) volunteers. Almost invariably within a few minutes the teacher admits defeat, it becoming obvious to her that she doesn't have at her fingertips a variety of techniques to deal with this "kid's" phonic difficulties. But now to involve the entire class in a fifteen minute exercise I administer an informal phonics inventory designed to assess their knowledge of important phonic generalizations as well as their ability to apply this knowledge in the explanation of the pronunciation of selected words. The results of this test, with few exceptions, are rather bad judging from the grimaces of the teachers as they score their responses while I dictate the correct answers.

The illustrations cited may appear sufficient to justify the need for helping these teachers (some of them exceptionally competent) to develop a philosophy of teaching phonics. But there are other compelling reasons.

Most elementary school teachers with whom I have come in contact are utterly dependent on the basal reader manuals for instruction on what and how to teach phonics. Examination of a typical basal reader manual presentation of phonics reveals that it is based on the substitution technique - the replacement of one phonetic element by another. Thus if a child is confronted with the new word "rake," he is expected to recall a word which in substance rhymes with that word (it contains the phonogram "ake") and then to substitute the "r" sound already within his repertoire of sounds (whether known in isolation or as part of another sight word, "rat" for example), and then blend the initial consonant with the phonogram to arrive at the new word's pronunciation. Similarly, this principle operates with respect to the substitution of blends, digraphs and medial vowels or their combinations.

No doubt many children learn quite well by this type of analogical reasoning. William S. Gray's On Their Own In Reading, a classic which has had a strong influence upon elementary phonics instruction, endorses this mode of teaching. Unfortunately, many children who are linguistically deficient, particularly those who have auditory discrimination or blending difficulties, are unable to profit from the substitution technique. Frequently this approach fails to help those children who experience problems in acquiring a basic sight vocabulary because their style of learning does not permit them to retain the visual configuration or image of a word in order to make a mental comparison among, let's say, "cake", "rake" and "rat." These children are not able to extract the word's similar elements through analogy and to blend the discrete phonetic elements into a new word "rake". Basal reader manuals do not offer a solution to this problem.

Another shortcoming in teaching phonics traceable to a slavish and/or unenlightened use of basal reader guides is that all students are taught the same phonetic element at the same time regardless of need. Thus according to the instructions in one manual the digraph "ch" should be taught. But it may very well be that a majority of the class already knows how to figure out words in which this element occurs. Nevertheless, the book"says" it's time to teach this sound and that's what the teacher attempts to do. Needless to say much valuable time is wasted teaching children information with which they are already thoroughly familiar. I might say parenthetically that when a teacher indulges in such practice while performing before her supervisor she makes herself look good. Individualized reading exponents inveigh against the lock step teaching of phonics and some of the suggestions that they offer to eliminate it are sensible.

Yes, many manuals do suggest that teachers need not follow the exact sequence of their material - that the judgment of the teacher is paramount, but since a high percentage of teachers are inexperienced, these admonitions are worthless.

Another pitfall in teaching phonics relates to the presumed power of children to figure out the sounds of certain consonant-vowel combinations in a new word on the basis of familiarity with a word whose initial sound is the "same" as that of

the new word. Two examples are cited from Reading In The Elementary School by Jeanette Veatch (Please note that it is not my intention to detract from the excellence of this text):

Teacher: This new word begins like "boy". Say "boy". (Child does.) Now say "ball" (Child does and teacher has him repeat several words beginning with the letter "b.") Now get your mouth ready to say "boy" again. Don't say it. Let me see your mouth. Fine. Now can you keep your mouth shut that way and make a new word that ends like "took"?" (Many children can successfully say "book" after this much help. But if not, the teacher can continue with the simplification

The author subsequently gives three other examples designed to help the student to recognize the word. Example 4 is quoted:

Teacher: Well don't you worry about not getting the word. You will catch on next time. I was trying to get you to hear that "boy" and "took" went together to say "book." Now you follow me and say these words. (Child repeats after the teacher as requested.) While it would seem obvious to the reader that such a child has a reading disability, that may be no more serious than confusion about isolated sounds of letters. This happens so frequently that it needs the discussion that follows.)

In the preceding example, the teacher's ineffectiveness arises from her ignorance of an important linguistic finding concerning the variability of consonant sounds. The sound of "b" is slightly different in each of these words "boy", "book", "baby", "bargain", "bit", "box", "bone", "bat", "ball", etc. The elision of the consonant vowel combination is different for each word. Observe that when a person pronounces each of these words his lip and jaw movements for each "b" sound are different. Accommodation for this phenomenon should be taken into account when teaching a child how to differentiate among these different sounds. It is not sufficient for the teacher to tell the youngster to avoid an extraneous sound "u" in bu when pronouncing a word beginning with this consonant. Nor is it

instructive to tell retarded readers, "You know "look" and "boy." Get ready to say the "b" as in "boy" and make it rhyme with "look". Neither does "Can you put "boy" together with "took," "cook", and "look"," contribute very much to helping the boy's blending problem. Such procedures although helpful with "typical" students, fail to come to grips with the infacility of certain students to blend sounds. Roswell and Natchez in their book Reading Disability, p.17 say, "Children with developmental lag find great difficulty not only in distinguishing separate sounds, but in blending them to form words. This apparently requires a high degree of physiological integration."

A very popular misconception relates to the feeling that phonics mastery is simply a matter of learning various phonetic elements relating to consonants, vowels and syllabication and applying these principles or understandings to unlock the pronunciation of words. The misconception is even true with regard to systems whose main purpose is to regularize English orthography. We know that regardless of what phonetic or phonemic approach is used there are children who though they know the sounds of vowels and consonants and how to discriminate one sound from another and even how to pronounce syllables containing the discrete phonetic elements, nevertheless are unable to pull together the separate components from left to right in the exact temporal-visual sequence in which they occur and with sufficient speed for a particular word (already within the child's spoken vocabulary) to be identified. It is the rare phonic system which from the very beginning attempts to prevent errors (omissions, reversals and substitutions) resulting from this lack.

Perhaps the most widespread misconception relates to the function of phonics. Too often teachers believe that phonics in itself can turn a poor reader into a good reader. These teachers are misguidedly led to believe that skill in pronunciation is synonymous with reading skill. (No doubt Rudolf Flesch's book Why Johnny Can't Read had a great deal to do with perpetuating this fallacy.) Too often teachers approach phonics with the feeling that if a student understands its "scientific" methodology, then that student will be able to arrive at the

exact pronunciation of a word in much the same way that a person obtains the dictionary pronunciation of a word. But the analogy is an incorrect one. Dictionary pronunciations and syllabications frequently do not coincide with those obtained by decoding the printed symbols according to phonic generalizations.

Finally there are a number of dogmatic statements (unsubstantiated by solid research evidence) which I feel have clouded our perception of matters relating to the rationale, scope and methodology of phonics instruction. I shall refer to only five.

1. There is a best method of teaching phonics. This method is best because of its mode of presentation (analytic, synthetic, analytic-synthetic, speech-to-print, etc.) its sequence (short vowels first, next consonants, etc.) and its technique of presentation (visual aids, tapes, programmed instruction, etc.)

2. Attacking a word's pronunciation in any but a left-to-right progression (starting with the first letter and continuing to the next letter) is <u>verboten</u> since this will contribute to incorrect eye movements and faulty perception.

3. Phonics teaching should be postponed until the child has a basic sight vocabulary which contains the various phonetic elements that are to be learned.

4. Some phonic rules should be eliminated because research indicates that their utility is less than 50 per cent. The generalization that when certain vowels occur together in a word usually the first vowel letter represents its long sound and the second vowel letter is silent is a case in point.

5. Word analysis skills should be taught only during spelling and writing periods because they are not reading skills.

I should now like to reexamine the various pitfalls I have alluded to with the purpose of making suggestions as to how they can be avoided.

1. <u>The one-track-mentality error</u>

Most of us have come to recognize that a particular approach may be

effective for one type of youngster but not as effective for another. In view of this, it is indefensible to use the same approach or method for all children without regard to their learning style. Many children at all grade levels find it difficult to respond to the substitution technique when it is used as the sole method. Many of these children do however respond to one or more of the approaches that follow even though each approach has certain disadvantages.

(a) Synthetic phonics - The sounds of a word are identified in the order in which they occur one-at-a-time usually, then recombined. Thus L+A+N+D= LAND. This approach has been endorsed by Kirk, Kottmeyer, Corden, Monroe, Gillingham, Spalding and others. It is indeed a rigid perhaps even compulsive way of learning phonics but its effectiveness with certain types of disabled readers is indisputable (if we are to believe the accounts of those who've used them). Dictation and writing exercises are frequently useful in connection with this approach. Resynthesizing the individual letter sounds at increased speeds with the aid of a tachistoscope is most helpful.

(b) The initial consonant is first pronounced then the phonogram is added. Thus L+AND; or the phonogram is first sounded and the consonant sound is prefixed to it: AND L+AND. → LAND.

(c) The initial consonant is immediately combined with the vowel. LAND and the final consonants are added. Anna Cordts has popularized this approach, which is helpful in eliminating blending problems involving the elision of initial consonants with the following vowel element. Auditory discrimination and oral blending exercises commonly precede this approach. There is, by the way, no reason why these exercises (usually they don(t) should not precede the approaches previously mentioned.

(d) The stress vowel technique aids blending. The student pronounces the initial consonant and the immediately following vowel and then he repronounces the vowel but as part of the phonogram: L A A N D. When singing "The Star Spangled Banner" this is exactly what we do in "O'er the la and of the free and the Home of the brave." Of course by doing this we are making a two syllable

word out of a word that has but one syllable. But this is only a temporary crutch. The student should be told so and should be helped to recognize that "land" has one syllable because it contains one heard vowel sound. By progressively speeding up the interval between "la" and "and" or by prolonging the sound of a giving it two beats, the student will learn to make the correct sound.

I must reemphasize that the exclusive use of any one of these approaches is not recommended. But familiarity with and application of these approaches including the substitution technique and others not mentioned will result in better learning, instruction and remediation. Each of these techniques may contain some elements which work for a particular child. A combination of two or more of the above procedures may work even better.

Recently Robert Dykstra, Director of the Coordinating Center for the follow-up studies in the USOE-supported Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading, after making comparisons of reading achievement of children enrolled in four types of primary reading programs noted that by the end of second grade students initially taught by programs emphasizing sound-symbol relationships (I.T.A., linguistic approaches, phonics-first basal) produce superior word recognition skills and not at the expense of comprehension. The relevant point that Dykstra makes is "It appears that phonics can be taught in a variety of ways."

2. The <u>treat-them-all alike</u> fiction. This is a self-defeating formula because not every student needs the same dose of phonics for the same reason that every person who is sick doesn't require the same medicine. To avoid the indiscriminate teaching of phonic principles the wise teacher would do well to do at least one of the following:

(a) Administer an informal phonics inventory to the entire class to determine what phonetic elements and principles they already know. Such an inventory could be based on the minimum requirements for a particular grade level and including minimum essentials of the preceding grade levels. This information is readily obtainable from basal reader manuals and/or special tests which publishers design to accompany basal readers. Commercial inventories of phonics

information like those of Botel and S.R.A. provide another source. Curriculum guides such as Sequential Levels of Reading Growth in the Elementary School published by the New York City Board of Education are most helpful. Informal inventories require pupils to demonstrate ability to identify visually and aurally such phonetic elements as consonants, consonant digraphs, blends, short and long vowels, various vowel combinations and syllables. While the results obtained from phonic inventories are not always reliable, they do at least provide a tentative basis for individualizing instruction. Thus if after examining the children's responses to the inventory the teacher finds that all students need help in syllabication, she can teach syllable divisions and the principles governing them without any "guilt feelings" about going over the "same old stuff". If on the other hand only five children are found to be deficient in recognizing the sounds that the letters "b" and "d" have in final and medial positions, then instruction relating to this area of knowledge will be given only to these children perhaps in a small group while the rest of the class is engaged in some other purposeful activity. Another alternative is to select five students (who are proficient in this aspect of phonics who are willing to help and are acceptable to the ones in need of help) give them some preliminary "teacher training" on those aspects of phonics they are to teach, and provide a suitable time and place for the "teachers" to aid their "pupils." This alternative may be the more desirable in the light of what we are discovering about the potency of peer tutoring.

(b) Administer a spelling test made up of words designed to furnish information about the students' familiarity and/or mastery of certain phonetic generalizations. The Kottmeyer Diagnostic Spelling Test is helpful in this respect. The test yields grade norms which may or may not be useful.

(c) Examine the students' writing samples for clues to deficient word analysis difficulties.

(d) Administer either an oral reading test (Gray, Gilmore, Durrell) or an informal reading test to determine the students' word recognition errors (reversals, omissions, additions, substitutions, repetitions of words, syllables or letters).

3. The beat a dead horse compulsion. Instead of working empirically to discover why children are not responding to what appears to be a foolproof strategy, many teachers repeatedly continue to hammer away with the same technique with the feeling that the approach just can't be wrong so the kids must be at fault. Years of teaching have convinced me that if you've given your "pet" notion a fair try and it doesn't work, try something else. In connection with the example cited earlier involving the pupil who didn't respond to the teacher's attempt to get him to recognize a new word through the substitution technique, the problem might easily have been resolved by telling him that when "b" is followed by "oy" it's pronounced "bcy", when "b" is followed by a double o it is pronounced as in "book" or in "boot". The student must learn that the position of his lips and jaws change when he utters words containing the same initial consonant but followed by different vowel elements. If he looks at himself in the mirror as he articulates the following sounds and words he will notice the truth of this statement:

bo͞o	- boat, boom	bŭ	- bug, butter
bo͝o	- book	bă	- bat, basket
bär	- barber, barn	boi	- boil
bŏ	- box, bottle	bir	- bird
bĕ	- bed, bend	bow	- bow
bĭ	- big, bit	bou	- bounce

This type of activity is helpful in eliminating blending or elision problems.

Years ago I had retarded readers work on their own to conquer blending problems by providing them with key pictures of words whose initial syllables corresponded with the syllables which created the difficulties. The key pictures (several hundred) were drawn, critically examined and finally selected by a staff of artists all of whom were themselves retarded readers. Independent work with the pictures was preceded by some preliminary teacher guided procedures which I will briefly describe.

Teacher: What's this picture?

Pupil: It's a bat

Teacher: Say the word again but pronounce the "t" more softly than the first part of the word. Do this again but this time leave off the sound of "t". Now look at this syllable bă. That stands for the sound you just said when you left off the "t".

Let's see if you can guess the missing word. Each word starts with the sounds which you've just made. The opposite of front is back _____ . Something to carry things in is a basket _____. Not goodis bad _____. (Depending upon the severity of the student's problem, additional examples and reinforcement through writing or through writing and pronouncing are provided)

In view of the tendency for many of the more severely retarded readers to confuse "ba" and "ab" the following exercise was used.

Teacher: What is the difference between "ba" and "ab"? (Teacher writes these on the chalkboard.)

Student: Both have the same letter but they're in a different position. Both of the syllables are pronounced differently.

Teacher: Fine (Teacher then pronounces each combination.) How do you know which combination I've pronounced?

Student: I'm not sure.

Teacher: (Pronouncing the two syllables (b$\breve{a}$" and "$\breve{a}$b") Do you hear the "$\breve{a}$" sound in each of the syllables?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: As I pronounce "ba" and "$\breve{a}$b" tell me in which of the two you hear the $\breve{a}$ sound last?

Student: In "b$\breve{a}$"

Teacher: When do you hear the $\breve{a}$ sound in "$\breve{a}$b"?

Student: First

Teacher: Good. One way to avoid mispronouncing these syllables and others like them is to remember that the letter you see <u>first</u> will be the letter whose sound is first heard. The letter that you see second will be the letter whose sound you will hear second. Thus you see the $\breve{a}$ first in "$\breve{a}$b";therefore you must hear that sound <u>before</u> you hear the consonant.

The advantage of this type of lesson is that it encourages the student to realize from the beginning that the temporal sequence in which phonetic elements are heard must correspond to their spatial sequence.

4. The not playing the rules of the game error. This difficulty arises from not understanding the fundamental differences between phonetics and phonics. Perhaps the following illustration will serve to highlight these dissimilarities. The dictionary transcription of a word comes very close to a word's exact pronunciation. So a person desiring to find the correct pronunciation of a word (whether or not that word is in his spoken or aurol vocabulary) finds the word in the dictionary and then reads the dictionary pronunciation. If one wants to look up the pronunciation of "compact", it is necessary to know the meaning of this word because otherwise one will not know where to place the accent. The transcription indicating a word's pronunciation is a speech-to-print operation or an encoding process. In all reliable dictionaries one symbol (denoted by a letter) denotes one sound and one sound is represented by the same letter. Thus the sound heard in "blow" and "toe" is represented by the same symbol $\bar{o}$. The letter symbol $\ddot{u}$ (as used in the Thorndike Barnhart Junior Dictionary and Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary represents the same sound in such words as threw, move, shoe, food, through, fruit, blue, and rule in spite of disparate spelling patterns. Phonetics represents the true relation between sounds and letters in words. In contradistinction phonics does not represent the true relation between sounds and letters because

(1) One sound may be spelled in many different ways. The phoneme $\bar{o}$ has 12 spelling patterns: beau, beaux, crow, doe, dough, go, oh, sew, mauve, mot, broach, and yeoman.

(2) One letter may be sounded in different ways. The letter a has these sound values: bake, bat, about, father, many, ball, wash. When this vowel is in combination with certain letters other sounds are represented: carp, aisle, Caesar, law, mountain.

(3) Phonics is a decoding process using fossilized language to arrive at current pronunciation. Many words retain spelling patterns which no longer reflect the sound patterns of an earlier period of history. Many vowels formerly pronounced are now omitted, modified or unstressed. Phonics methodology is not too helpful in estimating a word's primary and secondary stress - so very important in pronunciation.

(4) In view of the fact that there are only 26 letters in the English alphabet to represent perhaps twice that number of separate sounds any system which utilizes this alphabet as a basis for establishing sound-symbol relationships sacrifices accuracy and by so doing leads to some confusion.

(5) Phonic rules are helpful only when the word to be deciphered is within the spoken or aural vocabulary of the decoder. The dictionary transcription of a word yields the correct pronuncation because it alone is based on the way the word sounds in spoken conversation and because its transcription is one in which each heard sound is represented by an unchanging symbol for that sound. Of course certain words have alternate pronunciations but their transcriptions reflect this.

Rather than to say that phonics is a key (with the connotation of unraveling a puzzle or opening the door to a word's pronunciation) I think it would be more accurate to suggest that phonics is a wedge which helps the decoder to get his foot into the door. How widely the door is opened is dependent on the extent to which the decoded elements sound like the real word. At least two factors may militate for or against the word's being identified by the decoder:

(a) The word must have been heard or used by the decoder otherwise he will not know after decoding it whether its pronunciation is correct. He is stymied because he has no frame of reference to make this decision.

(b) Even after a word is decoded the decoder may not recognize it because he doesn't know which syllables, vowels and consonants are stressed, unstressed or omitted when it is pronounced.

5. The voice of authority fallacy. Some pronouncements made by experts have been accorded a sanctity and a reverence out of proportion to their value. When these ex cathedra statements are scrutinized they are found to contain unproved information, half-truths, or misinformation. I should like to consider some of these statements.

(a) There is a best method of teaching phonics. There isn't a shred of evidence to substantiate this statement. The order in which certain consonants and vowels are introduced and the mode of presentation differ according to what

approach is being used. Depending on who is making the assertion a particular approach will be invested with an aura of superiority. Thus Gillingham, Spalding and Carden would no doubt aver that synthetic phonics is the "right"approach - that this approach is a more rational approach in attacking words than the analytic approach espoused by the basal reader editors (not Lippincott). Still others would argue that an analytic-synthetic approach is superior. Others, including myself, would be in favor of an eclectic approach. It should be noted that despite the asseverations made by exponents of various approaches attesting to their superiority, all promoters claim their brand produces good results and these merchandisers usually offer some evidence to back up their claims. I might say that I have seldom, if ever had unanimity of opinion among my graduate students who are teachers regarding the superiority of a particular "method." Almost invariably teachers take a pro and con position regarding various phonic approaches. Perhaps it is appropriate to s that it is not the method or approach that one uses that is the crucial factor. But it is what one does with that approach or method that really counts.

(b) Attacking a word's pronunciation in any but a left-to-right direction will interfere with correct eye movements and result in faulty perception. This statement is probably based upon the observation that many retarded readers make regressions, reversals, omissions and substitutions when reading. Actually it may be desirable for large numbers of retarded readers to learn to attack a visually unfamiliar word pattern in different ways. Those tending to omit or confuse endings but who are proficient in initial consonant recognition should be conditioned to pay more attention to suffixes. Those who lose confidence when they see a long word perhaps would be a little less frightened if they framed the initial and final parts of words simultaneously, e.g. construction. For those children who seldom err with respect to the initial and final parts of words the center of instructiom should shift to the medial vowel. For example for those who say "binding" for "bending", "change" for "charge", "diner" for "dinner." In the last case the clue to vowel pronunciation is the presence of either a single or a double consonant immediately preceding a suffix beginning with "e". The absurdity of statement (b)

is at once obvious in reading these words: robe, cube, mane, bite. How is one to know how these words are pronouncedunless one is first aware of the final "e"?

Often poor readers misread words which look alike because they ignore the sound of the medial vowel elements. Thus "pit" is misread "pet", "green" becomes "grin", "crow" is confused with "corn". I have found that if students are taught to say the vowel element before anything else and then to listen to the sound of that element he is less likely to make medial vowel errors. The important information that teachers using this approach must impart is that even though the student first says the vowel sound, its position in the word will dictate the order in which it is heard. Thus in deciphering "pet" the child says e (to "tune in" to the sound he must hear when he pronounces this word) but this sound is in the middle of the word or in the second position. A consonant letter sound "p" must be heard before "e" and the consonant letter sound of "t" must be heard at the end of the word. The blending of the various sounds may be accomplished in any of the various ways previously mentioned.

(c) Phonics teaching should be postponed until the child has a basic sight vocabulary which contain those phonetic elements that are to be taught. This statement has wide acceptance particularly because many basal readers use this formula. But there are many independent code-emphasis from-the-beginning of reading programs (Words in Color, Mazurkiewicz-Tanner. ITA, Phonovisual method, and Lippincott's phonic program) which are at variance with this point of view. Any observant parent or teacher knows that many pre school children catch phonics on the fly from listening to TV ad slogans and jingles and nursery rhymes.

Again there is no research evidence to indicate that if phonics teaching follows the principles in statement (c) that teaching will result in better achievement than if instruction were to proceed according to the tenets of various phonics-first programs. As a matter of fact, what evidence we do now possess from the first and second grade studies (USOE) favors the latter approach as a beginning reading technique.

(d) "When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second one is usually silent has only 45 per cent of utility and consequently is of limited value." The author of this statement (paraphrased) examined four sets of basals widely used in the primary grades and found 309 words conforming to this generalization and 377 non conforming words. Had the study examined upper elementary and intermediate grade words instead of primary grade words the results might have been somewhat different. A study by Anna Cordts of children's vocabulary shows that with each successive level of reading the relative number of phonetic words increases from 20 per cent at the pre-primer level to more than 80 per cent on the sixth grade level. (See An Analysis and Classification of the Sounds in the Children's Reading Vocabulary in Grades 1-3, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa and a Study of the Reading Vocabulary, Grades 4-6 both authored by Anna Cordts.) I will not quibble over statistics. The important point to remember about the utility of a particular phonics generalization is that its utility is considerably enhanced by the context in which the word occurs. This is the real test and I dare say that if in the study previously alluded to consideration were given to this factor, the per cent of utility would be considerably higher. But the study loses sight of another fact - phonics is not always an open sesame to a word's pronunciation. Phonics does however provide a handle to gradually opening up the door of a word's pro - nunciation. Its main purpose is to help the decoder to come near enough to a word's pronunciation so that with some manipulation and/or contextual or structural analysis clue that word is brought to the threshold of the decoder's recognition.

The utility of phonic generalizations depends upon the following considerations:

(a) Manipulation. Since the nature of phonics is to deal with variable phonemes (vowels, consonants and accent) the decoder should play with a word's pronunciation by changing a long vowel to one that is short or by shifting accent. Using phonics will permit a child to obtain con stī tū tion. Perhaps this inaccurate pronunciation may in itself trigger recognition of the correct one. But in case it doesn't, simply changing the long ī of the second syllable to a short

vowel sound will do the trick. The word "liver" may have initially been transcribed as li ver. But such a pronunciation seems inappropriate. If the decoder substitutes the short vowel sound of ĭ and places the accent on the first syllable, he "has" the right word.

(b) Using context - The phonic equivalent of "ocean" is ō sē ān. All sorts of manipulation will not help the decoder to open the door wider. But in the context of the sentence "Sharks swim in the ocean", the word is at once recognized. The correct pronunciation of "colonel" emerges not through manipulation but from context (assuming that the decoder has heard the word and is aware of the significance of military rank) in the sentence, "The major was promoted to the rank of colonel." Structural analysis clues which in a sense are context clues may also facilitate one's recognition of the word as in "swordfish," "standoffish", and "motherhood."

(e) "Word analysis skills should be taught only during spelling and writing periods because they are not reading skills" is a statement that has the the power of authority behind it. Nevertheless, it represents opinion not fact. One can dispute this statement as I shall attempt to do. When word analysis skills are taught as encoding skills they are probably better taught in a separate writing period. But if the focus is on decoding the printed or the written word, practice should take place in the context in which it will be most frequently used - during oral and silent reading periods. This is the most natural seting for the application of decoding skills. Reading does after all involve a translation of the printed symbol into its sound equivalent. The progression is from print to speech not vice versa as is the case with spelling and writing. Now of course in order to be able to transcribe the printed symbol into its auditory equivalent one must have had preliminary work in hearing separate sounds and discriminating these sounds from each other. The foundation work is in auditory discrimination. This may involve learning to listen to similar and dissimilar phonemes and even learning to write or to recognize the symbol that stands for a particular sound (encoding) as well as learning to say the sound that stands for the letter (decoding). In

other words during the pre reading and readiness stage of a child's development encoding and decoding and phonic and phonetic activities are almost inextricably woven together. At these stages of development statement (e) is more defensible.

All too frequently when word analysis skills are taught during separate spelling periods emphasis is placed on isolated words divorced from the context in which they occur. There is no guarantee that a child's knowledge of the correct spelling of a word on a spelling test will insure his spelling that word correctly when he uses it in a composition a little later on in the day. Teachers know only too well that their children will misspell many of the words "known so well on spelling tests" when they use these words in connection with exercises in the content subjects. Again knowing how to spell certain word patterns because of intensive practice with those patterns during a separate spelling or writing period does not guarantee that the child will be able to recognize that spelling pattern when he reads a story in which he must read sentences containing many diverse patterns. How many times have you observed children read and spell with impunity a list of basic sight words and then misread these words when they appeared in context?

I see no reason why time spent in creative writing activities should be usurped by word analysis activities. By so doing we are "robbing Peter to pay Paul." I can think of no better way to dampen enthusiasm, spontaneity and creativity for writing than to oppress children with word analysis exercises.

I have the feeling that exponents of the point of view expressed by statement (e) are guilty of egocentricity and shortsightedness. I have taught reading to ghetto youth (whose speech was slovenly and incoherent and whose verbal thinking habits were disorganized) by means of a writing-spelling approach and can state that the results were negative. I don't mean to imply that the youngsters didn't learn by this approach. Some did. But such an approach was devoid of dramatic interest for student and teacher. Worst of all this approach proved to be distasteful and frustrating to these linguistically deficient youngsters. The approach that was subsequently used, one that had better results, was a listening-speaking-reading-writing progression. Word analysis skills were most frequently taught in connection

with material read in class. During the reading period in intermediate and upper grades I observed that these children subsequent to preliminary and post discussions of materials read in class (including explanations of difficult words and concepts and explanations of various word analysis techniques) were better able to write the answers to questions based upon the stories read and that the activity of writing in a structured situation following the reading-discussion phase promoted superior application of word recognition techniques.

I have tried to present a few arguments against the wholesale acceptance of statement (e). I do not wish to foist my own suggestions on all teachers. My intention has been to suggest that there are alternatives. Throughout this paper I have inveighed against dogmatic statements of the variety: Thou shalt or shalt not.....What may be one person's poison (for the teacher and/or the pupil) may be another person's sustenance.

If teachers are to avoid some of the pitfalls of teaching phonics, they must be open minded, flexible and willing to try new things.